

ADVENTIST SUPPLEMENT TO

Light Through the Darkness

A Vindication of God



M. M. Campbell



Have you ever wondered...

- Why a loving God would burn humans eternally for the sins of one short lifetime?
- How the gentle Jesus perfectly reflected the "fire breathing" Old Testament God He came to reveal?
- How a "killing" God can tell humans "Thou shalt not kill" and yet to pattern their characters after His own?
- Why God did not destroy human rebellion early-on, before it became full blown?
- Whether humans really have free will, with God planning to execute those whose choices He does not like?
- How the "wrath of God" applies to our generation?

Written from a Christian standpoint, *Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God* answers these questions in a fresh and thorough way that appeals to Christians, non-Christians and atheists alike. Sensible, clear, straight to the point—this work has changed the minds of thousands, who now rejoice in seeing God in a better way. Follow the trail of Biblical clues in this work to a wonderful new picture of God.

Also by M. M. Campbell:

The Language of Heaven: Unconquerable Power For Your Life

Please visit <http://www.BeholdYourGod.info/loh>

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Key to Abbreviations of Ellen White Sources

AA *Acts of the Apostles*

COL *Christ's Object Lessons* (the parables)

DA *Desire of Ages* (a biography of Christ)

Ed *Education*

EW *Early Writings*

FCE *Fundamentals of Christian Education*

MCP *Mind, Character and Personality*

MH *Ministry of Healing*

MR *Manuscript Releases*

PP *Patriarchs and Prophets*

RH *Review and Herald Articles*

SM *Selected Messages* (4 volumes)

BC *SDA Bible Commentary*

SC *Steps to Christ*

T *Testimonies for the Church* (9 volumes)

TM *Testimonies to Ministers & Gospel Workers*

Introduction

As a supplement to the book *Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God*, which supports its view solely from Scripture, this work assembles relevant material from Spirit of Prophecy and from distinctly Adventist concepts, in support of the thesis that God does not destroy in the way we have historically believed. As we apply the microscope of inspiration to the world of eternal human loss, an entirely different dynamic emerges than we have understood in the past.

According to this more in-depth view, God “destroys” as follows:

1. Humans choose sin as a final way of life.
2. This final choice evicts God’s presence, as He cannot stay where humans have made a free-will choice to live apart from Him.
3. Since God is the Life Giver and Protector, without Him there is no protection against Satan’s malevolence and no life.

According to this view, destruction occurs only when God cannot intervene to protect. In the interests of clarity and brevity every effort has been made to pare the supporting data set out in this Supplement to “bare bones” and to present only the basic framework of the concept. Readers who understand the view described in *Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God* will have no difficulty fitting the various pieces of evidence presented in this small work into the overall picture.

Problems

The view of God as a destroyer has troubled thinking people within the Judeo-Christian world for centuries. For example, how can humans make a free-will choice to serve Him, with God holding over them the threat of hell fire if they don't?

Below are some of the factors of interest in connection with the traditional view of God as a destroyer.

Inconsistencies: Why did God allow Lucifer and Cain to live and yet destroy the antediluvians? Why did He wait until sin had come to fruition before acting? If God destroys as traditionally believed, why not destroy the few, initially, and save the many? If Lucifer and Cain were exercising their free will, which God had to honor, could not the same be said for the antediluvians? Why did God put a protective mark on Cain to shield him from avengers?

Consider these possible answers. God didn't destroy Lucifer and Cain because He doesn't act that way. He put a mark on Cain because He is love personified. The weight of sin in the antediluvian world compared with the weight of righteousness in Noah and his family balanced the scales on the side of sin, depriving God of authority to intervene to prevent the worldwide flood.

When God warns against sin, He warns not of His personal retribution but of sin's natural results. God's role—the most destructive thing He does—is simply to withdraw (What choice does He have?) and leave the location where sin has become entrenched, exposing it to the destructive power of Satan. This is God's strange work (See p. 23).

Language Problems: The next question is obvious: God expresses Himself in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy as *acting* to destroy. Why? Consider these two facts:

1. The surface meaning of Scripture can be misleading. For example, the Bible seems to express the thought that the flames of hell burn forever. A deeper study reveals the *Bible definition* of “forever” and results in a doctrine of hell more humane and more compatible with what we know of God’s character.

This doctrine creates a precedent which favors a *Bible definition* over a dictionary definition of Biblical concepts, thus permitting the Scriptures to interpret themselves, particularly where a significant contradiction is concerned (See Section One, p. 9).

2. The words God uses to express His involvement let us know that *nothing is ever truly out of His hands*. He has ultimate power in all situations. Nothing but His commitment to the free will of His creatures could induce Him to leave them vulnerable to a destructive master like Satan. Certainly, in His perspective He sees and describes Himself as *doing* what He does not prevent. God is the ultimate Blame-taker for everything that happens in His universe. Satan is the accuser; God, by contrast, takes the blame.

Contradictions: Scriptural contradictions must be harmonized to achieve the following:

1. Both sides of the issue must be taken into account. We cannot accept one side, discard the other, and expect we have arrived at truth.
2. Conclusions must blend with previously known truth (5T 295). This study both harmonizes with and adds to the light of present church doctrine. It particularly stresses four “givens” of Adventism:
 - a. God is love.
 - b. Jesus revealed the Father.
 - c. The Ten Commandments transcribe God’s character.
 - d. Humans have no inherent life in them; rather, the only life in humans is given them of God.

3. We are to reach conclusions based on the weight of evidence (DA 458). God would violate human free will if He made truth so coercive that the unwilling would be forced to accept it.

Contrast and Compare

The four-column chart in Section One contrasts perspectives regarding final punishment of the unrepentant. Some Bible texts describe it one way, while others suggest it happens quite differently.

Section One (p. 10) shows graphically how this doctrine constitutes the precedent that gives the present study credibility. Please note that the Christian world in general is “fixed” at the ‘One Perspective’ column, while Adventism studied through to the answer to the last column, ‘Remarks’. Similarly, understanding “God destroys” requires one to press on beyond the surface meaning.

Section Two (p. 12-19) contrasts perspectives on a variety of Bible events; God’s role is often described in two different ways. These examples show it is not unreasonable to interpret statements describing God’s acts of destruction as saying He simply withdraws His life support and allows “nature to take its course.”

SECTION ONE

Question

(A)

How long will the wicked
Suffer final punishment?

One Perspective

(B)

They will be tormented day and
night *forever and ever*
(Rev. 20:10).

As Sodom and Gomorrah . . . are
set forth as an example, suffering the
vengeance of *eternal fire* (Jude 7).

[The slave's] master shall also bring
him to the . . . door. . . . and he shall
serve him *forever*
(Exodus 20:6).

**Another Perspective
(C)**

The day which is coming shall burn them up . . . they shall be *ashes* (Malachi 4:1, 2).

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into *ashes* (2 Peter 2:6).

**Remarks
(D)**

An apparent contradiction.

But the cities are not now burning.

The Biblical definition of “forever” can be “until death.” Death is forever, because nothing will ever reverse it.

SECTION TWO

1) Who hardened Pharaoh's heart?

And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But *I will harden his heart*, so that he will not let the people go" (Exodus 4:21).

2) Who killed the firstborn of Egypt?

God speaking: "For *I will pass through the land of Egypt* on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt *I will execute judgment*: I am the Lord" (Exodus 12:12).

3) Whose idea was it to spy out the Promised Land?

And *the Lord speaks* to Moses, saying, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them" (Numbers 13:2).

4) Why did the serpents bite?

So *the Lord sent* fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died (Numbers 21:6).

5) Who assaulted Job?

Satan said, "Stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" After Satan's first assault against Job, God said to Satan, "You incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause" (Job 1:11; 2:3).

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, *he hardened his heart.... But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also neither would he let the people go* (Exodus 8:15, 32). *Satan wrought ... in a manner calculated to harden the heart of Pharaoh* (1T 292).

For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the *destroyer* to come into your houses to strike you (Ex. 12:23).

Moses said, “And everyone of *you* came near to me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come’” (Deut. 1:22).

Because of Israel’s transgression, impenitence, and stubbornness, *the Lord removed His restraining power from these reptiles* (8T 50).

Behold, all that he has is in *your* [Satan’s] power; only do not lay a hand on his person (Job 1:12).

The following clarifies the meaning of Col. B “(God) might have prevented it ... but this He did not choose to do” (5T 119-20. Also 1BC 516-7; 1MCP 35-6).

And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon [destroyer] (Rev. 9:11. See also PP 278-80).

Here it was proposed by the people that spies be sent up to survey the country. The matter was presented before the Lord by Moses, and *permission was granted* (PP 387).

The history of Job had shown that suffering is inflicted by Satan (DA 471).

6) Who is a lying spirit?

The Lord said, "Who will persuade Ahab to go up that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?"... A spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, ... "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the prophets" (1 Kings 22:20, 22).

7) Who led King David to number Israel?

The anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel and *He* moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah" (2 Sam. 24:1).

8) Who struck Jesus?

I God will strike the Shepherd. . . . We esteemed Him *smitten of God* (Zech. 13: 7; Matt. 26:32; Isa. 53:4).

9) Who killed Saul?

So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. But he did not inquire of the Lord; therefore *He killed him* (1 Chron. 10:13, 14).

10) Who creates evil?

God speaking: "*I ... create evil*" (Isa. 45:7, KJV).

11) How were Israel and Samaria destroyed?

The destruction ... *was directly from God* (RH 2/12/1914).

It is impossible for God to lie
(Hebrews 6:18).

Now *Satan* stood up against
Israel and moved David to
number Israel (1 Chron. 21:1).

My God, My God, why hast thou
forsaken Me? (Matt. 27:47, KJV).

Then Saul said to his armorbearer,
“Draw your sword, and thrust me
through with it,” ... But his
armorbearer would not,... therefore,
Saul took a sword and fell on it (1
Chron. 10:4).

God did not create evil. He only made
the good, which was like Himself....
Evil, sin, and death were not created
by God; they are the result of
disobedience, which originated in
Satan (5T 503).

[Same event] God was *compelled* to
allow their enemies to take them
captive (RH 2/26/1914).

12) Who destroyed Jerusalem?

Jesus prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem through a parable: "But when the king *[symbolizing God]* heard about it, He was furious. And He sent out His armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (Matt. 22:7).

13) How did Israel become vulnerable to surrounding nations?

God speaking: "Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation. *I will send him against an ungodly nation*" (Isa. 10:5, 6).

14) What happened to Sodom and Gomorrah?

The Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-6).

15) Who punished King David?

I [God] will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor (2 Sam. 12:11, 12).

16) Who destroyed the antediluvians?

And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, *I will destroy them with the earth*' (Gen. 6:13).

The Jews had forged their own fetters; they had filled for themselves the cup of vengeance ... says the prophet: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" ... Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work. . . . *the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will* (GC 35-6).

By their transgression of God's law the people of Judah had *forfeited His protection*... By their apostasy and rebellion they were inviting the judgments of God (5T 749).

How can I *give you up*, Ephraim?
How can I *hand you over*, Israel? How can I make you like *Admah*? How can I set you like *Zeboiim*? (Hosea 11:8).

Not that God prompted these acts of wickedness, but because of David's sin He *did not exercise His power to prevent them* (PP739).

Satan is the destroyer. God cannot bless those who refuse to be faithful. . . . All He can do is to permit Satan to accomplish his destroying work. . . . The Lord's power is not exercised.... *Like the inhabitants of the Noachic world* [people today] refuse to have any thought of God. Wickedness prevails to an alarm extent, and the earth is ripe for the harvest. (6T 368-9).

Cities of the plains identified as Admah, Zeboiim, Sodom and Gomorrah in Deut. 29:23 and Genesis 14:2, 8.

Compare GC 431, 608, 615; Job 22:15-17.

17) Is God furious?

I am full of the *fury of the Lord* (Jeremiah 6:11).

18) Who executes the wicked?

Fire was breathed from God upon them [the lost], and consumed them. This was the EXECUTION OF THE JUDGMENT. And fire came down *from God* out of heaven and devoured them (Revelation 20:9) [Note: Some translations delete "from God" in Rev. 10:9. See also Job 1:16: "The fire of God fell from heaven..." Was it of God or of Satan?] (RH 11/1850; caps in original).

19) How shall we understand other inspired statements that God *does* what reason and other references say He "doesn't"?

Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit *from the Lord* tormented him (1 Samuel 16:14, NIV).

God will send them strong delusion (2 Thess. 2:11).

I *the Lord* have [margin: 'misled'] the prophet (Ezekiel 14:9).

That same night the angel of Yahweh went out and *struck* down a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp (Isaiah 37:26, JB).

I the Lord, keep it. I water it every moment, lest any hurt it. I keep it night and day. *Fury is not in Me* (Isaiah 27:4).

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but *He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves*, to reap that which they have sown (GC 36). Speaking to Satan, the prince of Tyre, God says, “So I made a fire come out *from you*, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching” (Ezekiel 28:18, NIV).

God didn’t prevent it.

He doesn’t prevent it.

He didn’t prevent it.

He didn’t prevent it.

[The second beast] worked great miracles, even to calling down fire from heaven onto earth while people watched (Rev. 13:13)

God sees and describes Himself as *doing* what He does not prevent.

What Is the Third Angel's Message?

Revelation 14:6-12

1. *"Fear God."* Put away sin (Exodus 20:20; Proverbs 3:7; 8:13; Deuteronomy 5:29).
2. *"Give glory to Him."*
 - a. We were created for God's glory, not our own (Isaiah 43:7). When we believe this, self will die.
 - b. Bear fruit of Spirit (John 15:8; Gal. 5:22, 23)
3. *"Hour of His judgment is come."*
 - a. Investigative Judgment.
 - 1) Discovered in connection with the Sanctuary message (Dan. 7:9, 10)
 - a) *Sanctuary Cleansed*, Day of Atonement = Cleansing of Sanctuary (Dan. 8:14; Lev. 16:16)
 - b) *Sanctuary Cleansed*. Earthly Sanctuary symbolized heavenly reality (Dan. 8:14; Heb. 9, esp. v. 23; Rev. 11:19, and other places)
 - c) *Sanctuary Cleansed*. Also the human heart (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Before God cleanses (blots out) the

heavenly records of sin, He will first cleanse the lives of His people from the presence of sin. This cleansing of the human heart is the “basic unit” of the Sanctuary message.

NOTE: The heavenly Sanctuary will be cleansed after God dries up the fountain of sin at its source, in the hearts and lives of His people on earth.

- 2) Occurs following 2300-day prophecy in 1844 (See Daniel 7:9, 10, etc.)
- 3) Places reward and punishment after judgment, which led to discovery of nonimmortality of soul, which led to concept of second death, which led to revelation of God’s love in giving Christ to die the second death for sinners. (See DA 753; 2T 209, 210) Only through “conditionalist” eyes can we see the depths of love God expressed in giving His Son to die the second death for sinners.

b. *The Judgments of God.* Relates to fate of earth in consequence of sin.

c. *God is being judged* by intelligent universe to see if Satan’s charges against him are true or false. Does He expect sinners to do the impossible? Put away sin and keep His law? Jesus did it, but He was divine as well as human (says the enemy). Can real humans do it? God says Yes. Satan says No. At the end of time God will have a people who will vindicate Him in the great controversy by allowing Him to fill them with the practice of righteousness, as God filled Jesus with it.

4. “*Worship Him who made heaven and earth and the springs of water.*” Message calls for return to worship of the Creator through observance of the Sabbath, the sign of who He is.

5. “*Babylon is fallen.*” Points out the departure of popular churches from teachings of Scripture. (See Revelation 17:5.)

6. “*Wine of wrath of her fornication.*” Again, refers to dilution of gospel with pagan concepts, especially the intent to change Sabbath to Sunday. (7 BC 979)

7. "Wrath of God." See No. 9.

8. "Forever and ever." The surface view here indicates the wicked will suffer eternal torment. Because this does not correlate with the fact of nonimmortality of the soul, further study reveals the doctrine of eternal *annihilation* of the lost. While we can derive the logic in expressing that doctrine as it is here expressed, it is inescapably opposite the total message of Scripture regarding the fate of the lost.

9. "The Wrath of God." Here also we must think in opposites: Malachi 4:5 predicts the coming of a forerunner to prepare the way for Christ. John the Baptist fulfilled that role for Christ's first appearance. He symbolized those who will give the third angel's message in preparation for Christ's second coming. This is traditional Adventist thinking. John the Baptist did, in fact, prophecy the coming "wrath of God" against Judea. "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt. 3:7). Like the message of Elijah and presumably the final warning, his message called for repentance and return to obedience to God. Connecting John's reference to the "wrath to come" with the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, *Great Controversy*, p. 20, says: "The hour of hope and pardon was fast passing; the cup of God's long deferred wrath was almost full." (See also "wrath to come," p. 37.) Page 28 continues, describing events in the invisible world in A. D. 70: "*God withdrew His protection from them and removed His restraining power from Satan and his angels, and the nation was left to the control of the leader she had chosen.*" (emphasis supplied)

Page 36 reinforces this thought: "We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan... God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves to reap that which they have sown."

Spirit of Prophecy is clear that the "wrath of God" which destroyed Jerusalem symbolized the "wrath of God" which will finally destroy our world. "In the fate of the chosen city we may behold the doom of a world that has rejected God's mercy and

trampled upon His law" (GC 36).

Applying this information to the third angel's message clarifies how the "wrath of God" results in coming judgments. He is not, in fact, the executioner of the judgments. Impenitence has caused "the Holy One of Israel to cease from before" the people, leaving them vulnerable to the leader they have chosen, just as it did to Jerusalem.

Just as the third angels' message cannot sound without an accurate knowledge of how "forever and ever" applies to the fate of the lost, neither can it sound in its primary, antitypical fulfillment without accurate knowledge of the meaning of "the wrath of God."

10. "*Commandments of God.*" The Ten Commandments

11. "*The faith of Jesus*" is the "message of justification by faith" (commonly called the 1888 message; see 1SM 372). The 1888 message of righteousness by faith reveals how to avoid the two extremes of legalism, on one hand, and antinomianism, on the other, in the interpretation and practice of righteousness (SC 59ff).

12. "*Most fearful message*" (GC 449).

13. "*Last message*" (MM 334; COL 415).

QUESTION: In how many ways does this message admonish to put sin out of our lives?

CONCLUSION: In a manner unprecedented since John the Baptist, the third angel's message lays the axe to the root of the tree of sin.

God's Strange Work

For the Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim; He shall be wroth as in the Valley of Gibeon—that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act (Isaiah 28:21, KJV'; emphasis supplied).

Adventists have believed and taught that God's "strange work" is the final destruction of the wicked following the millennium. Certainly, raining fire upon people would be a strange work for humans to do, especially holy humans, but we have granted our holy God the right to do this, since He created the lives in the first place. A careful study of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, however, does not support this view. God's strange work is, in fact, an act of destruction, similar to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem.

"To Him [God] the work of destruction and the denunciation of judgment is a strange work.... 'O Israel,' the Lord says, 'thou hast destroyed thyself'" (DA 582-3, quoting Hosea 13:9. Read in context).

Desire of Ages, pp. 580-88 and *Great Controversy*, pp. 17-38 describe the dynamics involved in the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. When the people made an unchangeable commitment to continue in sin, so natural to the human heart, they were unconscious that it swung them eternally into the destroyer's camp. Under the terms of the great controversy, the choice of humans determines who shall be their master; if they refuse to repudiate sin, then God, who can no longer reach them anyway, has to back off. It is the power of God

through the Spirit that restrains the power of the enemy in our world. Without the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, humans are vulnerable to destruction and desolation. Thus it was with Jerusalem. Thus it will be with the world.

God's strange work is also "as in" incidents that occurred on Mount Perazim and in the Valley of Gibeon. We must find how these incidents are similar, because God's strange work of destruction will occur in a similar way.

The Bible records only one significant incident occurring at each of these locations—both confrontations between the forces of God and those of paganism:

a. **Mount Perazim.** David versus the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:17-20).

b. **The Valley of Gibeon.** Joshua versus Amorites (Joshua 10:12-19).

In each case the Lord *delivered up* the Canaanites for destruction, because ...

"The Canaanites had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and the Lord would no longer bear with them. His defense being removed from them, they would fall an easy prey to the Hebrews" (4T 151).

God's strange work is the handing over of the unrepentant to their enemies:

"Who knows whether God will not give you up to the deceptions you love? ... When God shall work His strange work on the earth ... woe will be upon the people" (5T 77).

Spirit of Prophecy pinpoints *the exact point in time* when God will do His strange work:

"Every century of profligacy has treasured up wrath against the day of wrath; and when the time comes and the iniquity is full, then God will do His strange work. It will be found a terrible thing to have worn out the divine patience; for the wrath of God will fall so signally

and strongly that it is represented as being unmixed with mercy; and the very earth will be desolated. It is *at the time of the national apostasy*, when acting on the policy of Satan, the rulers of the land will rank themselves on the side of the man of sin—it is then the measure of guilt is full; the national apostasy is the signal for national ruin (2SM 373, emphasis supplied).

"God's judgments will be visited upon those who are seeking to oppress and destroy His people. His long forbearance with the wicked emboldens men in transgression, but their punishment is nonetheless certain and terrible because it is long delayed. '*The Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, He shall be wrath as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do His work, His strange work and bring to pass His act, His strange act.*' Isaiah 28:21. To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act.... By terrible things in righteousness will He vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law. The severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor may be judged by the Lord's reluctance to execute justice. The nation with which He bears long, and which He will not smite until it has filled up the measure of its iniquity in God's account, will finally drink the cup of wrath unmixed with mercy.

"When Christ ceases His intercession in the sanctuary, the unmixed wrath threatened against those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark (Rev. 14:9, 10) will be poured out. The plagues upon Egypt when God was about to deliver Israel were similar in character to those more terrible and extensive judgments which are to fall upon the world just before the final deliverance of God's people" (GC 627-8, emphasis supplied).

"Protestantism shall give the hand of fellowship to the Roman power.... Then there will be a law against the Sabbath of God's creation, *and then it is that God will do His strange work in the earth....* God keeps a record with the nations: the figures are swelling against them in the books of heaven; and when it shall have become a law that the transgression of the first day of the week shall be met with punishment, then their cup will be full" (RH 3/9/1886; 7A BC 910, emphasis supplied).

The above quotations support the following conclusions about God's strange work:

1. It is an act of destruction released by God.

2. It will parallel the way in which He destroyed the:

- a. Philistines
- b. Amorites
- c. city of Jerusalem

3. It occurs when God gives up the finally unrepentant to the master they have chosen. However, it is more accurate to say they give Him up, having made a final choice for the world—a choice God has to honor. “God never forsakes people or individuals until they first forsake Him” (2SM 278).

4. It begins when a law is passed “against the Sabbath of God’s creation,” saying “the transgression of the first day of the week shall be met with punishment” (7A BC 910). Christ soon thereafter ceases His intercession in the sanctuary. This signals the close of human probation and commencement of the seven last plagues (Rev. 15:8; 16:1; GC 627-8).

No where do the Bible or Spirit of Prophecy say God’s strange work is the destruction of the wicked at executive judgment.

The French Revolution

"The restraint of God's Spirit was removed from a people that had despised the gift of His grace. Evil was permitted to come to maturity. And all the world saw the fruit of willful rejection of light" (GC 265, regarding the French Revolution).

"Centuries of apostasy and crime had been treasuring up wrath against the day of retribution; and when their iniquity was full, the despisers of God learned too late that it is a fearful thing to have worn out the divine patience. The restraining Spirit of God, which imposes a check upon the cruel power of Satan, was in a great measure removed, and he whose only delight is the wretchedness of men was permitted to work his will" (GC 286, regarding the French Revolution).

"The centralizing of wealth and power, the vast combinations for the enriching of the few at the expense of the many, the combinations of the poorer classes for the defense of their interest and claims, the spirit of unrest, of riot and bloodshed, the worldwide dissemination of the same teachings that lead to the French Revolution are all tending to engulf the world in a struggle similar to that which convulsed France" (*Education* 228).

"Would we know the result of making void the law of God? The experiment has been tried. Terrible were the scenes enacted in France when atheism became the controlling power. It was then demonstrated to the world that to throw off the restraints which God has imposed is to accept the rule of the cruellest of tyrants. When the standard of righteousness is set aside, the way is open for the prince of evil to establish his power in the earth" (GC 512, regarding the French Revolution).

Azazel

In the sanctuary service of the Old Testament, God revealed the plan of salvation in symbol. Day by day sins were confessed into the sanctuary, where God assumed responsibility for dealing with this terrible problem, even to the extent of permitting His own Son to bear the guilt and consequences actually accruing to human account.

The last act on the Day of Atonement represents God's last dealing with sin. Everything that occurs in the courtyard represents events that take place on earth. That which occurs in the Sanctuary represents those events that take place in heaven and are unseen by human eyes, where we follow the Lamb's activities by faith.

The "Azazel" event occurs in the courtyard, meaning it will be visible. Confessing the sins of the righteous over Azazel, the scapegoat, meant something. It was not simply ritual. (See 2 Thess. 2:3-5.) It symbolized an event to mark God's last effort on behalf of the human race, when the eyes of the world and the universe fix upon him who was responsible throughout those years when God assumed the blame. He will be exposed in a unique and unprecedented way.

From that point, the scapegoat is led out to the wilderness, representing the millennium, where he is *abandoned* to die. This marks the finale of earth's experiment with sin.

A “Problem” Quotation

Some Adventists think the following quotation contradicts the character of God message:

“The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He permits” (GC 614).

Those who believe God is nondestructive see no difficulty whatever in this quotation. They need only ask the questions: 1) *How* do holy angels destroy? And 2) *What is the “command” of God to holy angels to destroy?*

Holy angels destroyed Job when God gave them the command to “Release” the hedge about him. His command to holy angels in Egypt to “Release” allowed evil angels access to various aspects of the arsenal of nature and finally to Egypt’s firstborn (Exodus 12:23; Psalm 78:48, KJV). God “struck” His own Son by commanding holy angels to “Release” Him to destruction.

The activity described in the above quotation could be a simultaneous action described in the best terms available to the writer at the time, considering that time for a fuller understanding of the character of God had not yet come.

Anyone reading the setting on pages 614 and 615 of *Great Controversy* will see that Ellen White is overwhelmingly supporting our position in this matter. She would not write in support of our alternate view in such a clear way and then, in the middle, throw in a statement diametrically opposing it. This quotation by no means negates the character of God message, and the weight of inspired testimony still confirms it.

Optical Illusions

Inspiration sometimes describes events as they appear to human perception, rather than in terms of what actually took place. The following example illustrates this principle:

Did the magicians' rods become real serpents?

One Perspective

"And every man [magician in Egypt] threw down his rod and they became serpents" (Exodus 7:12).

"The magicians' rods did become serpents" (1T 292).

Another Perspective

"The magicians . . . did not really cause their rods to become serpents, but by magic, aided by the great deceiver, made them appear like serpents" (5T 696-7).

"To human sight the rods were changed to serpents. . . . Thus the testimony . . . [and] scriptures speak of it *as the case appeared* (Editor's note to 1T 292 (p. 716); emphasis supplied. See also 5T 696-8, PP 264.)

Applying this principle to descriptions of God's role in human destruction may clarify such statements as: "A fire came out *from the Lord* and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense" (Numbers 16:35).

Since such statements contradict both Christ's benevolent character and the weight of inspired evidence, and since they describe situations where demonic authority held sway, we may suspect that they too describe cases as they appeared, rather than as they actually occurred.

Keep in mind, communicating to humans the truth about His character was a serious problem to God, a problem so serious, in fact, that fifty percent of the reason Jesus came to this earth was to *reveal* the character of the Father. We cannot begin to comprehend the trickery the enemy has

exercised to portray Him in the worst possible way. Therefore, a good rule to follow in understanding the Father's character is that *Jesus is the baseline*. Anything and everything out of harmony with the portrait of God *He* painted is suspect.

The Final Fire

I have long wondered why the God of love would, first, resurrect the wicked and then burn them. Why bother to resurrect them at all? This new framework of understanding God's wrath may shed light on that puzzling behavior. Consider this possible scenario:

God's strange work is His release of the "four winds of heaven" at the close of human probation, allowing them to "blow upon the earth." His strange work is His declining any further to intervene to prevent the destructive work of Satan, his demons, and his subjects. Now the universe will see both a demonstration of Satan's style of government unchecked by God's mercy and a demonstration of perfect obedience by those who have made the righteousness of Christ their defense.

God intervenes only one more time. When demonic jurisdiction has unleashed the energy to totally destroy the world, God calls intermission. He intervenes one final time on behalf of those who have given Him authority to do so by living righteously through His enabling power. The righteous (both living and resurrected) live and reign with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). The unsaved sleep in death during this time.

The universe of intelligent beings have an opportunity to view the culmination of the principles of Satanic government. Questions remaining in the minds of the redeemed are settled during the millennial judgment of the dead, until every voice unites in proclaiming "just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints" (Revelation 15:3, KJV).

"(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished)" (Revelation 20:5, NIV). At the end of the thousand years He resurrects the lost, saying, in essence, "As you were." The universe must now see the inevitable destiny of self-centeredness, deprived of the intervention of Mercy. The wicked rise with the same unregenerate hearts, the same malevolent thoughts, they carried to the grave a thousand and more years before.

God now "destroys the wicked" by revealing to them that they

have been deceived. In panorama He presents a view of their lives and shows them the series of bad choices that brought them to this undesirable point. He shows them a wounded and bleeding Savior who opened a door into the heavenly city but from which they are now forever barred, as He closes the gates (GC 664).

Finally the people understand what it means to be lost. In a rage they turn on Satan and his agents who have deceived them. But through Ezekiel God says, "They have blown the trumpet and have made all ready, but *none goes to the battle*" (7:14, Amplified).

They look up into the face of their righteous judge, who sits on a pure white throne high above the city. Suddenly spinning through their mind runs the memory of every sin they have ever committed. The protective veil is torn off as they remember with blinding accuracy every foul deed—unconfessed and unforsaken—that has piled up against them in the heavenly books of record. At last they realize that, undiminished by God's veiling mercy, sin kills. They remember that sin killed Jesus and they know that sin will take their lives as well.

Some yield quickly to death. Some continue to struggle for awhile until death overtakes them. But Satan, chief rebel against God, struggles longest and is the last to die.

Ezekiel 39, a narration of this event, says in verse 4, "I will give thee unto the ravenous birds of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured." But birds and beasts do not devour living beings. Only then does the final fire ignite, and God does not intervene to stop it.¹

See *Light Through the Darkness* (main book) for a more in depth study of the final fire.

¹ We have evidence of the self-destructive nature of Satan's jurisdiction in a statement from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 99: "Satan himself, who was compelled to remain in the midst of the warring elements [of the flood], feared for his own existence." The universal flood resulted when human sinfulness made it impossible for God to hold back the destructive forces of nature. Satan, whose influence precipitated sin and thus the flood, feared for his existence during that catastrophe. In the final fire from heaven, his own ways will finally destroy him.

Compilation

“Had Christ been in the sickroom, Lazarus would not have died; for Satan would have had no power over him. Death could not have aimed his dart at Lazarus in the presence of the Life-giver” (DA 528).

“In Gethsemane the sins of men weighed heavily upon Christ, and the sense of God’s *wrath* against sin was crushing out His life.... In His agony He clings to the cold ground, as if to prevent Himself from being drawn farther from the Father” (DA 687, emphasis supplied).

“The sword of justice was unsheathed, and the *wrath of God* against iniquity rested upon man’s substitute, Jesus Christ.... It is a fearful thing for the unrepenting sinner to fall into the hands of the living God.... Never was this proved to so great an extent as in the agony of Christ ... when He bore the *wrath of God* for a sinful world” (5BC 1103. EGW states repeatedly that Christ bore the wrath of God; i.e., 1T 482, 2T 214, RH 2/24/1874, RH 9/11/1888, RH 10/9/1888, RH 6/17/1890, etc., etc. Emphasis supplied.)

“Get ready, get ready, I beseech you get ready before it shall be forever too late! The ministers of vengeance will pour all the terrible judgments upon a God-forsaken people” (RH 6/6/1887, emphasis supplied).

[**Note:** When Spirit of Prophecy mentions God’s “judgments,” it invariably also mentions, either before or after, God’s “withdrawal” or “release” or “giving over” of the recalcitrant into the enemy’s power. Watch for these. Here are other examples:]

“Already He is sending *His judgments* upon the earth. Terrible plagues are visiting our world, in famines, in floods, in calamities by sea and land, in earthquakes in divers places. And because of men’s wickedness the Lord does not *restrain* the destroying power” (RH 12/8/1896, emphasis supplied).

“In our imagination we could behold dimly the scenes of the terrible

destruction in the days of Noah. We thought of the burning of wicked Sodom, when the earth was defiled under its inhabitants, and we remembered that we were living in a time similar to the time preceding the judgments which fell upon the old world. The Spirit of God is now withdrawing from the people of the earth."

"As the restraining power of the Holy Spirit shall be withdrawn, because of the impenitence and ingratitude of men, terrible things will be witnessed in the earth" (RH 8/13/1889 and RH 9/3/1889, emphasis supplied).

"I saw the Lord turn to such in *anger*, in *wrath*, and repeat these words: 'Go to now, ye rich men.' ... Oh, I saw it was an awful thing to be thus *forsaken* by the Lord" (1T 175, emphasis supplied).

"By their transgression of God's law the people of Judah had *forfeited His protection*. ... By their apostasy and rebellion they were inviting the *judgments* of God" (5T 749, emphasis supplied).

"While the Jewish leaders professed to have great zeal for the honor of God and the good of Israel, they were enemies of both. By precept and example they were leading the people farther and farther from obedience to God—leading them where He could not be their defense in the day of trouble" (AA 417).

"By the Babylonish captivity the Israelites were effectually cured of the worship of graven images. During the centuries that followed, they suffered from the oppression of heathen foes, until the conviction became fixed that their prosperity depended upon their obedience to the law of God" (DA 28).

"... all suffering results from transgression of God's law.... suffering is inflicted by Satan" (DA 471).

"... [God], Who has given them only blessing" (DA 478).

"They [the people of Nazareth] had turned from Him whose mission it was to heal and restore; now they manifested the attributes of the destroyer" (DA 239-40).

"His [Jesus'] wonderful works had been done to restore, never to destroy" (DA 115).

"It is God that shields His creatures and hedges them in from the power of

the destroyer.... Satan has control of all whom God does not especially guard. He will favor and prosper some in order to further his own designs, and he will bring trouble upon others and led men to believe that it is God who is afflicting them" (GC 589).

"Satan is constantly accusing Christians as the cause of loss, misfortune, and suffering, instead of allowing the reproach to fall where it belongs—upon himself and his agents" (GC 515).

"It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan" (GC 36).

"Hundreds are starving for bread, while famine and pestilence are seen and felt, because God cannot ... protect those who are working contrary to His will" (8T 51).

"Satan is the destroyer. God cannot bless those who refuse to be faithful.... All He can do is permit Satan to accomplish his destroying work. We see calamities of every kind and in every degree coming upon the earth, and why? The Lord's restraining power is not exercised" (6T 388-9).

"Only through their transgression of God's law can he [Satan] obtain power over them.... Because of their [Israel's] sins they had been well-nigh consumed in the flame kindled by Satan and his agents for their destruction" (5T 469-70).

"The restraining Spirit of God is even now being withdrawn from the world. Hurricanes, storms, tempests, fire and flood, disasters by sea and land, follow each other in quick succession. Science seeks to explain all these. The signs thicken around us, telling of the near approach of the Son of God, are attributed to any other than the true cause. Men cannot discern the sentinel angels restraining the four winds that they shall not blow until the servants of God are sealed; but when God shall bid His angels loose the winds, there will be such a scene of strife as no pen can picture" (6T 408, emphasis supplied. Also 2SM 51-2 and GC 589-90).

"If God's blessing rests upon you because you surrender all to Him, you will prosper" (2T 496).

"God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself" (COL 84).

"God does not annul His laws. He does not work contrary to them"

(Ed 148).

"If obedient they [Israel] would be preserved from the diseases that afflicted other nations, and would be blessed with vigor of intellect" (COI 288).

"Sickness, suffering, and death are the work of an antagonistic power. Sat is the destroyer, God is the restorer.... When Christ healed disease, He warned many of the afflicted ones, 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee' John 5:14. Thus He taught that they had brought disease upon themselves by transgressing the laws of God, and that health could be preserved only by obedience" (MH 113).

"They [heavenly beings] marked the work of ... Satan constantly pressing darkness, sorrow, and suffering upon the race, and Christ counteracting it (PP 69).

"We are to observe carefully every lesson Christ has given us throughout His life and teaching; He does not destroy. He improves whatever He touches" (ISM 118).

"The emblem in the form of a dove that hovered over Jesus at His baptism represents His gentleness of character" (2SM 238).

"It grieves the heart of God, as our Father, to *let justice smite*" (RH 6/30/1891, emphasis supplied).

"Had Satan and his host ... been *left* to reap the full result of their sin, they would have perished" (DA 764, emphasis supplied).

"The plagues of God will fall, and He will prevent them not" (RH 7/27/1897).

"God never compels a man to offend and be lost. We read that He hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and that Pharaoh refused to let Israel go. Did God strengthen and confirm the king in his obstinacy? No. He simply allowed the seeds of unbelief to produce their fruit; and the seed sown when the first miracle was rejected produced a harvest of infidelity. God left the king to the inclinations of his own heart" (RH 7/27/1897).

"The Lord had never commanded them [Israel] to 'go up and fight.' It was not His purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict

obedience to His commands" (PP 392).

[Israel] "had transgressed the law of God and thus separated from the Source of their strength, and had been *left* to become the prey of their heathen enemies" (5T 468, emphasis supplied).

"All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son" (8T 386).

[In cleansing the temple] "Jesus does not smite them with the whip of cords" (DA 158).

"There are but two classes in the world—the class that know God and the class that know Him not. The spiritual man belongs to the first class, the natural man to the other; and it is according to our estimate of the character of the Father and the Son that our class is determined" (RH 2/10/1891).

Character: The First and Final Issue

"The understanding of the people of God has been blinded, for Satan has misrepresented the character of God. Our good and gracious Lord has been presented before the people clothed in the attributes of Satan, and men and women who have been seeking for truth have so long regarded God in a false light it is difficult to dispel the cloud that obscures His glory [character] from their view" (1SM 355).

"It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misrepresented and misunderstood. *At this time* a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known.... Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, 'Behold your God.' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love" (COL 415, emphasis supplied).

"Different periods in the history of the church have each been marked by the development of some special truth, adapted to the necessities of God's people at that time. Every new truth has made its way against hatred and opposition; those who were blessed with its light were tempted and tried. The Lord gives a special truth for the people in an emergency. Who dare refuse to publish it? He commands His servants to present the last invitation of mercy to the world. They cannot remain silent, except at the peril of their souls" (GC 609).

"In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation" (COL 127).

“When the character of Christ is fully reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own” (COL 69).

“The truth that we are to proclaim is that ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ This truth is to be developed in the closing scenes of this earth’s history.” (Ms. 53, 5/11/1905).

Revelation 18:

“Angels were sent to aid the mighty angel from heaven, and I heard voices which seemed to sound everywhere, ‘Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and that ye receive not of her plagues, for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembeted her iniquities.’ This message seemed to be an addition to the third message, and joined it as the midnight cry joined the second angel’s message in 1844” (1SG 194-5. Compare TM 300.).

“I stated [at the 1888 General Conference Session] that … there was to be special light for God’s people as they neared the closing scenes of this earth’s history. Another angel was to come down from heaven with a message, and the whole earth was to be lighted with his glory. It would be impossible for us to state just how this additional light was to come. It might come in a very unexpected manner, in a way that would not agree with the ideas that many have conceived” (Letter 22, 1/18/1889).

“The truths of the third angel’s message have been presented by some as a dry theory; but in this message is to be presented Christ the Living One.... Through this message the character of God in Christ is to be manifested to the world” (6T 20).

“Multitudes have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal” (PK 177).

Other Relevant SOP References

“Great truths that have lain unheeded and unseen since the day of Pentecost are to shine forth from God’s word in their native purity. To those who truly love God, the Holy Spirit will reveal truths that have faded from the mind and will reveal truths that are entirely new” (FCE 473).

"Most startling messages will be borne by men of God's appointment, messages of a character to warn the people, to arouse them. And while some will be provoked by the warning and led to resist light and evidence, we are to see from this that we are giving the testing message for this time. Messages will be given out of the usual order" (9T 137).

"Introduce nothing that will cause dissension, without clear evidence that in it God is giving a special message for this time.... If the pillars of our faith will not stand the test of investigation, it is time that we knew it" (TM 106-7).

"Those who think they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change a cherished opinion, will be disappointed. When a brother receives new light upon the Scriptures, he should frankly explain his position and every minister should search the Scriptures with the spirit of candor to see if the points presented can be substantiated by the inspired word" (TM 30).

"Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what" (ST 707).

"Nothing frightens me more than to see the spirit of variance manifested by our brethren. We are on dangerous ground when we cannot meet together like Christians, and courteously examine controverted points. I feel like fleeing from the place lest I receive the mold of those who cannot candidly investigate the doctrines of the Bible. Those who cannot impartially examine the evidences of a position that differs from theirs are not fit to teach in any department of God's cause.... If I think I have new light, I shall do my duty in presenting it" (1SM 411-2).

"Amidst the confusing cries, 'Lo, here is Christ; Lo, there is Christ' will be borne a special testimony of truth appropriate for this time, which message is to be received, believed, and acted upon ..." (Ms. '122, 10/9/1903).

"The *whole spiritual life* is molded by our conceptions of God; if we cherish erroneous views of His character, our souls will sustain injury" (RH 1/14/1890, emphasis supplied).

Answers to Objections to the Character of God Message

Objection 1: The Drawn Sword

While “Abaddon” and “Apollyon” (see Revelation 9) may refer to Satan, they are not the original words for many Biblical references to “the destroyer.” Is it possible that in some instances the word “destroyer” designates God or His agent? 1 Chronicles 21:12 and Numbers 22:22f, for instance, are self-evident examples where angels *of God* destroy.

Answer:

“Satan is the destroyer, Christ is the restorer” (MM 291). “God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself” (COL 834). It would be hard to improve on the clarity of these statements, which appear frequently throughout the Spirit of Prophecy. If they do not mean what they say, what do they mean? Scripture may state God or His agent “destroyed” (rather than calling God “a” or “the” destroyer). To be concerned about this point, however, shows lack of understanding of our position. The right question, when considering God as destroyer is not “whether” He destroys but “*how*.” I know of no one who believes the character of God (COG) message who has any problem with the many instances of destructive acts attributed to God in the Bible. Why? Because in our minds we automatically ask the question, *HOW* did He destroy? Let me illustrate with the two examples cited above:

“David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem” (full story in 1 Chron. 21:12-16).

“Now the donkey [of Balaam] saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand ... [saying] surely I would have killed you” (Numbers 22:22-33).

On the surface these incidents appear damaging to the case for a nondestructive God. As humans, what can we conclude from these

descriptions other than that God or His agent will use the mentioned sword in an act of destruction? Because of the similarity of the descriptions and because of the consistency of God, we cannot reasonably deny that what is happening in one instance is happening in the other. No, the sword is not said to penetrate human flesh, but perhaps that is the Bible's way of protecting us from "hearing of blood" (Isaiah 33:15). We see part way into the invisible world, but who actually wields the destructive sword? Who does the destruction? Is it the personal agent of God, as would logically appear to our human minds? Or is something else going on not revealed to our human vision?

Inspiration records a similar incident where we DO have full vision. Because of the consistency of God's character, I submit that what was taking place in THIS instance was taking place in all three.

"He [Jesus, in A.D. 70] beheld the destroying angel with sword uplifted against the city [of Jerusalem]" (GC 21).

Note the visual similarity with the two incidents previously cited. In this instance we see fully into the invisible world. We know exactly HOW the destruction took place:

"God withdrew His protection from them and removed His restraining power from Satan and His angels, and the nation was left to the control of the leader she had chosen" (GC 28, emphasis supplied. Read the entire chapter).

If the drawn sword over Jerusalem in A.D. 70 represented the withdrawal of God's protection and resulted in destruction, could it not represent the same in the other two episodes and elsewhere? Could the drawn sword signal the commencement of God's wrath (withdrawal of His protection) and release of the finally impenitent into the hands of their chosen master? Such a scenario agrees with our best example of God's wrath: the execution of Jesus, and also with the example of Job, where the curtain draws aside to reveal the dynamics of destruction.

Further, "the sword of justice was unsheathed against Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane" (5BC 1103). Did God pierce Christ's flesh with a literal sword? No. It symbolized God's withdrawal. Similarly, Judges 7:14, 18, and 20 state: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." How many Midianites did Gideon and his army pierce with a sword? How many swords did they carry with them into battle?

Objection 2: God is Responsible

What is the difference whether God personally executes or releases the wicked to destruction? He is still as responsible as if He Himself had “pulled the trigger.”

Answer:

God appears to agree with that assessment. Perhaps that is why He describes Himself in Scripture as destroying. However, if the COG message is incorrect, an astonishing amount of material exists in the inspired word that supports it.

Is God to blame for granting free will to His creatures? Free will is the lynch pin of this entire new view of God. Free will is the foundation of God’s government in heaven and in earth. And it is as an act of deference to human free will that destruction comes from God. In union with God through the Holy Spirit, humans have life. Outside that union there is no life. To perceive no existence apart from God should be no stretch for Adventists who have believed in conditional immortality from the beginning. Yet the decision for or against the union is ours to exercise. In the final analysis, perhaps free will is the real destroyer. But would we want to live in a universe without it?

Further, placing free will in a great controversy setting adds to our understanding of this point. Satan claims humans as his rightful prey. Jesus claims His blood on their behalf. The universe watches, closely observing the character of the principals. God must deal justly; can He protect and defend humans when they exercise their free will to obey Satan? (Satan says NO! The universe watches. What are God’s choices now?) Then who is responsible for the results when God is obliged to release? In view of all the agencies He set in motion to save humanity, is God responsible?

Objection 3: Sudden Destruction

Often when transgression occurred in Scripture the punishment was swift and sudden. Enough time would not intervene after God withdrew His protection for Satan to move in and do the executing. The story of Uzzah is a case in point.

Answer:

Satan, it seems, is by nature a killer. “If [God] lets go His hold of us for one moment, Satan stands ready to destroy” (6BC 1078). Let God’s protection be removed in the slightest degree and Satan will instantly express his destructive nature (unless it is to his advantage to delay temporarily). It makes sense that he would especially like to destroy when he knows God

will get the blame. God does not have to ask him to destroy; He does not need to set an appointment. The following quotations reflect how quickly Satan can move into a place left vulnerable by the withdrawal of God and His agents:

"When he [Satan] was suffered to afflict Job, how quickly flocks and herds, servants, houses, children were swept away, one trouble succeeding another as in a moment" (GC 589).

"Upon a hillside not far distant a great herd of swine was feeding. Into these the demons [note] asked to be allowed to enter, and Jesus suffered them. Immediately a panic seized the herd. They rushed madly down a cliff and unable to check themselves on the shore, plunged into the lake and perished" (DA 338).

When God removes His protection from the earth in the days ahead, this point will become crystal clear. Then perhaps the COG message will be more believable to some, when they see the land wasted and realize the potential for such devastation could not exist in the same mind that conceived the saving plan of the cross.

Objection 4: Spirit of Prophecy View

Spirit of Prophecy contains some strong statements that God does, in fact, destroy.

Answer:

Yes. Some examples are Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 4, p. 50, and vol. 1, pp. 328-30, 385-6; Ms. 5, 1876 and so forth. Many examples exist of statements Ellen White has made which, on the surface, appear seriously to damage the COG message. But in assessing her statements regarding God's role in destruction, we must take into account her growth in understanding this issue. Note the following quotation from Letter 14, 1883:

"I was shown in the vision given me of the judgment...."

Ellen White is going to tell us something God showed her during her "vision of the judgment." According to 4 Testimonies 384, she received that vision on October 23, 1879. Here, then, she describes what God revealed (among other things) to her at that time:

"I was shown in the vision given me of the judgment, that God would send warnings, counsels and reproof.... I was shown that the time was in the near future that these whom God has warned and reproved and given

great light, but they would not correct their ways and follow light, He would *remove from them that heavenly protection* that had preserved them from Satan's cruel power. The Lord would surely *leave* them to themselves to follow the judgment and counsels of their own wisdom. They would simply be *left* to themselves and the protection of God [would] be *withdrawn* from them, and they would not be shielded from the working of Satan.... None of finite judgment and foresight can have any power to conceive of the care God has exercised through His angels over the children of men in their travels, in their houses, in their eating and drinking. Wherever they are, His eye is upon them. They are preserved from a thousand dangers, all of them unseen. Satan has laid snares, but the Lord is constantly at work to save His people from them. But those who have no sense of the goodness of God, who refuse His merciful warnings, who reject His counsels to reach the highest standard of Bible requirements, who do despite to the Spirit of grace, the Lord would *remove* His protecting power.

"I was shown that Satan would entangle and then destroy, if he could, the soul he had tempted. God will bear long, but there is a bound to His mercy, a line which marks His mercy and justice.... It is Saran's power that is at work at sea and on land bringing calamity and distress, and sweeping off multitudes to make sure of His prey. Storm and tempest both by land and sea will be, for Satan has come down in great wrath. He is at work. He knows his time is short, and if he is not *restrained*, we shall see more terrible manifestations of his power than we have ever dreamed of" (emphasis supplied).

It appears that in the "vision of the judgment" God also clarified the dynamics by which the wicked are destroyed. In testing this hypothesis I have been unable to find strong statements damaging to the COG message written after 1879, nor do I find clear statements in support of the COG message before that time. Keep this question in mind in your own reading. If you find statements that contradict this theory, I am interested in receiving them. Some reformers (i.e., Martin Luther) knew more than they taught, simply because they could not manage the greater burden of promoting that greater light, and God did not require it of them. Perhaps this was Ellen White's experience where the COG message was concerned.

Finally, let me stress that those who have studied this message to the point they actually grasp what it says have no argument with anything Ellen White penned on this topic throughout her life and ministry. We can heartily say Amen to them all. Anyone who finds this odd should know thereby that they do not yet grasp fully what this message is saying.

Objection 5: The Eviction of Lucifer

If God does not use force, how did He evict Lucifer and Company from heaven when the great controversy began? Inspiration is clear that Lucifer did not volunteer to leave. "Satan and his angels ... were determined to remain in heaven with all their rebellion" (7 BC 973). In order to exclude them, God had no choice but to use force.

Answer:

Interestingly, we have no record that any blood was shed in turning Lucifer out of heaven. We know God never destroyed or used force or violence up to that time. "In righteousness [law keeping; see Psalm 119:172] He judges and makes war" (Revelation 19:11). Did the presence of sin obligate Him to change His changeless character in order to deal with it? Humans have allowed themselves to become confused regarding God and His ways by not adhering strictly to principle in interpreting the inspired word. On the basis of the principle that God's ways are always as set out in the Ten Commandments and are *changeless*, we can more accurately interpret events described in the word, regardless of their surface appearance.

Admittedly, the following is theoretical; however, the advancement of truth often begins with a theory, and the plausibility of the following scenario makes an apology unnecessary. Beginning with what we know, we proceed into the area of speculation.

"All the angels that are commissioned to visit the earth hold a golden card which they present to the angels at the gates of the city as they pass in and out" (EW 39).

My question is, Why? Are they concerned that the wrong beings might enter the city? In this big universe, who might that be? Might Lucifer & Co. have left the heavenly precincts for a strategy meeting and come back to find themselves excluded by a "golden card"?

Strengthening this idea is the fact that as we come to world's end God's people face the prospect of being excluded from world commerce, perhaps by a "debit card." A prominent precursor to that debit card is today's ubiquitous credit card, one of the most prestigious of which is the "gold card." Could Lucifer, the great counterfeiter, expect to exclude God's people from earth's society in the same way he and his followers were excluded from heaven's society—with a "golden card"?

Objection 6: Korah, Dathan & Abiram Revisited

Spirit of Prophecy states Israel "dared to attribute His [God's] judgments

to Satan, declaring that through the power of the evil one, Moses and Aaron had caused the death of good and holy men" (PP 405). It is clear from this and other statements that attributing a work of God to Satan, as *Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God* does in the case of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, constitutes the unforgivable sin.

Answer:

This is a serious charge. However, to say that *Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God* takes the position of the Israelites, whom God destroyed with fire after destroying Korah, etc., with an earthquake, is frankly shallow thinking.

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 396 and 635, says the Israelites believed that Moses and Aaron were operating under Satan's power. *Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God* does not take that position. I know of no one who believes the COG message who thinks that.

The Israelites believed Moses and Aaron brought the earthquake through occult means. Does *Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God*? Of course not. I know of no one who believes that. (A similar charge was brought against Jesus. It was not true in His case either. See Matthew 12:24.)

Sanctuary symbolism clearly supports the position of *Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God* in this case, in that requiring sin to be confessed over the scapegoat (representing Satan) identifies him as ultimately responsible for those sins, as *Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God* says he was in the Korah, etc., rebellion.

Patriarchs and Prophets, in the above quotation and also on page 426 calls the earthquake a "judgment" of God. See p. 35-36 of this work for a number of inspired definitions of "the judgments of God." These definitions support the book's interpretation of the deaths of Korah, Dathan, Abiram and some members of their families. Until we train ourselves to use inspired rather than Webster's definitions to understand Scripture, we will get nowhere in our understanding of truth.

Still, we cannot ignore that attributing a work of God to Satan represents the unforgivable sin. (See Matthew 12:24-32; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 405; and *Desire of Ages*, pp. 321-2.) Those who believe in a destructive God are as much at risk here as those who believe in a nondestructive God. What if God is revealing new truth to the last generation to facilitate their character development; what happens to those who reject that truth? Think about it.

Objection 7: Variable Burning

Spirit of Prophecy is clear sinners suffer varying lengths of time in the final fire. How does this occur, unless God specifically doles out and sustains punishment the prescribed length of time?

Answer:

This point transcends from the strongest evidence *against* the new view of God to the *most conclusive in its favor*. A literal fire creates an almost impossible dilemma for those of us who believe in a nondestructive God, but a *symbolic* fire fits in nicely with the new view.

The burning that the lost, including Satan, will experience is the same burning that Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane, where His bloody perspiration attested to His mental anguish, and on the cross. The fact that He died so quickly also says He gave in to emotional distress. It was prophesied of Him, "Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger? From on high he sent fire, sent it down into my bones" (Lamentations 1:12-13, NIV).

Satan's power to resist under these circumstances exceeds that of any other intelligence suffering as he is in that fire. The less wicked die quickly, as Jesus did. The profoundly wicked, as Satan is, can resist and will resist when others have given in to the flames of mental anguish, when they discover from personal experience that sin kills. The lost have never experienced the full weight of tortured memories, covered with the protection of God as they have been. But now the covering is removed, according to their wishes, and they see their own depths of depravity from which they have never repented. Satan merely endures it longer than any other.

Remember, Jesus was the Pattern Man. We can discover the fate of the wicked by observing His fate. His was a *symbolic* fire; the wicked suffer in a symbolic fire to which they give up their lives. When the last man standing, Satan, gives up his life, then begins the *literal* fire that God will use in creating a new earth.

Objection 8: The Final Fire

Even if God does not usually destroy, He must and does officiate at the final destruction of sin and sinners at the end of the millennium. It is not logical to say the devil will bring the fire that will destroy himself, his followers and cleanse the earth.

Answer:

One compromise of God's changelessness and Satan wins the great controversy. God says He does not change. From eternity the Ten Commandments have described His character. Satan has persistently tried to introduce circumstances that would require God to change, to transgress His own character, so as to vindicate his own actions. If God changes character at any time, He thereby forfeits the great controversy. He did not destroy before introduction of sin. Why would God, at the precise moment of His vindication, intervene to "snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory"?

If God kills once, He would thereby break His own law, commit sin and be subject to death. "The soul that sinneth [transgresses the moral law. 1 John 3:4] it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20, KJV). God does not excuse even Himself from that reality. Indeed, He cannot. His law—specifically the sixth commandment—tells us that!

The death of Christ revealed the Father's role in the sinner's death. In order to apply that death to sinners' accounts, the deaths must be equal in nature. Whatever happened to Jesus must also happen to the lost. In the death of Jesus the Father merely released Him to whatever fate awaited Him; in Jesus' case it was death at the hands of a murderous mob. His death serves as the absolute precedent to the deaths of the unsaved. In the case of the finally lost, the Father will simply decline to prevent the destruction, as He did in Christ's death.

Satan and his followers will put great confidence in war weapons, as Ellen White brings out in both *Great Controversy* and *Early Writings*.

"There are many skillful men in that vast army and they construct all kinds of implements of war" (EW 293). But all thought of using these weapons vanishes suddenly. When God reveals to them the truth, when they can no longer deny it, when they understand what it means to be lost, and they are lost, their resolve dissipates into knee-knocking despair.

Nuclear weapons, microwave weapons. Their commander has given them time to develop an unprecedented arsenal; but when the signal blasts, they are unmanned. "They have blown the trumpet and have made all ready, but none goes to the battle" (Ezekiel 7:14, Amplified).

"When the kings joined forces,
When they advanced together,
They saw her and were astounded;
They fled in terror,
Trembling seized them there,
Pain like that of a woman in labor"
(Psalm 48:4-7, NIV).

Suddenly the white throne judgment breaks upon them. The books are opened. They become aware of their every sin. They have nothing now to shield them, and they receive the full consequences of their sins, what they would have received in this life had not God sheltered them. They are "thrown into the lake of fire" by the sudden anguish of remembering their sins. Gradually they go away, as did Jesus, our great Sin Bearer, and as did Judas, the type of this experience. After the last man, Satan, expires, the final, literal fire begins.

Other Questions

Question 1: Best Evidence

What, in your opinion, is the best evidence that God does not destroy?

Answer:

The character of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ tells us all there is to know about the character of God. In order to see God as a destroyer, we must find the same quality in Jesus' character. Certainly opportunities for destructive behavior were there: When the Samaritans rebuffed Him; when His brothers ridiculed Him; when Simon thought insultingly of Mary Magdalene; when Judas kissed Him; when the religious leaders abused Him; when He came forth from the grave. Where is "vengeance" in the character of Christ?

Almost everything in Scripture except the character of Jesus has passed through human hands and is therefore subject to satanic smoke and mirrors. Even the prophets inquired and searched diligently into matters of which they themselves had written. How could the Word of God, the consummate expression of the Father's character, deviate so dramatically from the warrior God of the Old Testament and still be exactly like our changeless God in character? If that "Rock" that followed them was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4; Deut. 32:34), what happened to the character of Christ from the time of the Old Testament to the time of the incarnation?

Secondly, the COG message reinforces Scripture's claim of divine inspiration. Few Bible writers knew each other; most lived hundreds of years apart. How much they knew (if anything) about God's nondestructive character we do not know. Yet running as a common

thread through virtually all books of the Bible are those intriguing bits of evidence (many have puzzled Bible students for millennia), which, added together, reveal God as exactly like our Lord Jesus in character.

Third, the COG message relies on the historic “pillars of Adventism”; it does not attack or attempt to remove them. For example, it is far easier to comprehend the COG message if we first understand conditional immortality and the obligation to obey God. The character of God message not only relies on our historic beliefs but adds to our understanding of them.

Fourth, we may say of it as Ellen White said of the 1888 message, “It bears the divine credentials, for its fruit is unto holiness” (RH 9/3/1889).

No stronger argument has ever been given or CAN be given in favor of sanctification than the character of God message. I invite any critic to show where it fails to support the historic Adventist position on the need to put sin out of the life.

Finally, we have numerous Spirit of Prophecy statements that we may expect “new light” as we approach the end of time. “Some have asked me if I thought there was any more light for the people of God.... Increasing light is to shine upon us; for ‘the path of the just is as a light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day’” (RH 6/18/1889. See *Counsels To Writers and Editors*, pp. 33-51, for a section of “new light” quotations.) Few doubt the nearness of the end. Then where is the “new light”? Such must recommend itself by clarity of reason and “iron-clad” foundation in the inspired word, remembering those inevitable “hooks” our gracious Lord always leaves for people to hang their doubts on, should they choose.

It is too much of a coincidence that now, on the brink of eternity, an issue regarding what God is like has sprung spontaneously upon us just as it arose in heaven at the commencement of the great controversy. While the life of Jesus reveals God’s character lived out, the Ten Commandments depict God’s character written down. They agree. Both assure us He neither “kills” nor “murders.”

Question 2: Defenders of Truth

In your opinion why do some people have so much trouble seeing God as nondestructive?

Answer:

There may be several reasons. In opposing the COG message many people believe they are defending truth. That is a heavy motivation for which we can all feel some empathy. Also, a distant similarity exists between

the concept of a nondestructive God and some pagan religious concepts. This should not surprise us in view of Satan's penchant for taking truth and giving it a soul-destroying twist. Thus while pagan religions say God is so good humans will not perish, the COG message warns of the deadly results of ignoring God's plan of salvation.

The biggest obstacle, though in my view, is that in order to see the COG message we have to reverse our thinking in many ways, and some people have more trouble doing it than others. Sister White described the problem in these words:

"The understanding of the people of God has been blinded, for Satan has misrepresented the character of God. Our good and gracious Lord has been presented before the people clothed in the attributes of Satan, and men and women who have been seeking for truth have so long regarded God in a false light it is difficult to dispel the cloud that obscures His glory [character] from their view" (ISM 355).

I often illustrate this point with an optical illusion, which appears to be mere blotches; however, by squinting and using some imagination, the face of Jesus clearly appears. Some see the face quickly; some never see it. Those who stay with the effort long enough to see the face of Jesus in the blotches can never again see anything else in them. The exercise proves nothing, but it does illustrate well the difficulty some have in seeing God's character in a new way.

Question 3: Self-evident Destroyer

What would you like to ask those who see a destroying God in Scripture?

Answer:

I would be interested in hearing their responses to the following:

- a. Reconcile the nondestructive character of Jesus with that of a destroying God.
- b. Harmonize the many Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy statements that God does not destroy with the concept of a destroying God. (Remember, we have done this. We have reconciled those statements that appear on the surface to contradict our position.)
- c. Show from inspired sources:

1) What is God's "strange act"?

2) When does God do His "strange act"?

...so as to support the idea of a personally destroying God.

d. In order to be just, why must God personally execute the wicked, who, according to historic Adventist teaching, are technically dead already? Is it not God's power that gives humans life every moment? Why must He personally execute them to cease their existence?

Question 4: "Lord Baal"

It has been suggested that the word "lord" as used in the Old Testament sometimes means "lord baal" or Satan. Do you see light in this as an explanation for Old Testament instances of use of force by "the lord" (or angels or humans)? Are they sometimes operating under the sponsorship of "lord baal" rather than the Creator? The thunderings from Sinai are given as an example.

Answer:

I see no evidence to support this position. In fact, regarding Sinai, Ellen White reportedly "saw that the angels, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, surrounded the people of God as they assembled around the mountain, and all above them, thus making a great living tabernacle from which every evil angel [including Satan?] was excluded, that not one word that was to come from the voice of Jesus should be altered in any mind, or one suggestion of doubt, or evil, to a soul be made" (1893 *GC Bulletin* 377). Obviously, the fact that God may occasionally 'raise His voice' to get attention does not mean He destroys. (Cleansing the temple is a New Testament example.)

Inspiration shows God's inability to relate to Israel as He would ideally have liked due to their unbelief. Thus the Old Testament pictures God "through a glass darkly," as Israel's lack of faith forces Him to either reject them completely or deal with them in a less than ideal way.

Question 5: The Separation Process

Do we have information regarding the process by which humans are separated from God?

Answer:

We do have some rather specific inspired statements regarding the chronology of the Holy Spirit's separation at the rejection of Christ.

"Jesus wept over the beloved city.... When the fast westering sun should pass from sight in the heavens, Jerusalem's day of grace would be ended" (DA 577-8).

"He cast one lingering look upon the temple and then upon His hearers. In a voice choked by deep anguish of heart and bitter tears He exclaimed, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee....' This is the separation struggle.... Israel as a nation had divorced herself from God.... The final separation had come" (*Ibid.*, 620-2).

"When Caiaphas rent his garment, his act was significant of the place that the Jewish nation as a nation would thereafter occupy toward God" (*Ibid.*, 709).

"Not this man, but Barabbas.' Barabbas, the robber and murderer, was the representative of Satan. Christ was the representative of God. Christ had been rejected; Barabbas had been chosen. Barabbas they were to have. In making this choice they accepted him who from the beginning was a liar and murderer. Satan was their leader" (*Ibid.*, 739).

"The seventy weeks, or 490 years, especially allotted to the Jews, ended ... in A. D. 34. At that time, through the action of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the nation sealed its rejection of the gospel by the martyrdom of Stephen" (GC 328).

Question 6: Further Spirit of Prophecy

Do we have any evidence, other than that mentioned above, that Ellen White modified her views regarding God's role in destruction from her "early period" to her "mature period"?

Answer:

Yes. One example will suffice to illustrate: [She stated that at the destruction of the wicked] "the justice of God was satisfied" (EW 295). [Note how she changes the description of the same event in *Great Controversy*. She says:]

“The full penalty of the law has been visited; the demands of justice have been met; and heaven and earth, beholding, declare the righteousness of Jehovah” (p. 673).

If we had only the *Early Writings* statement, we might reach one conclusion regarding “the justice of God” and thus see God in one way. However, the *Great Controversy*’s expanded “definition” of *Early Writings*’ “the justice of God was satisfied” reveals the way in which God’s justice was satisfied, that it had something to do with teaching the universe the “rightness” of God’s position in the conflict. The final eradication of sin and sinners apparently proves a point in contention in that dispute. The universe responds, in essence, Oh, I see, God, you were correct. Thus God’s justice is satisfied—a very different picture than we would have with only the *Early Writings* statement.

I have no date for the following quotation but include it here because of its clarity:

“I was shown that the *judgments of God* would not come directly out from the Lord upon them, but in this way: They place themselves *beyond His protection*. He warns, corrects, reprobates and points out the only path of safety; then if those who have been the objects of His special care will follow their own course independent of the Spirit of God, after repeated warnings, if they choose their own way, then He does not commission His angels to prevent Satan’s decided attacks upon them. It is Satan’s power that is at work at sea and on land, bringing calamity and distress and sweeping off multitudes to make sure of his prey. And storm and tempest both at sea and land will be, for Satan comes down in great wrath. He is at work. He knows his time is short and, *if not restrained*, we shall see more terrible manifestations of his power than we have ever dreamed of” (14MR 3, emphasis supplied).

Question 7: 185,000 Assyrian Soldiers

Who killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers?

Answer:

This is another fascinating Biblical mystery, though on the surface it appears straightforward. The “angel of the Lord” smote them in one night, according to the record. (See 2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36; 2 Chronicles 32:21.) But more information exists in Spirit of Prophecy that reveals how this was done.

... in obedience to the command of Christ ... (DA 700). [Christ Himself commanded the destruction. How was it accomplished? Note the following carefully.]

A supernatural terror.... 'There were they in great fear where no fear was' (GC 117).

Read this paragraph in *Great Controversy* carefully. Ellen White includes this incident, along with the Red Sea passage and Gideon's defeat of the Midianites to illustrate God's use of "a supernatural terror" to defeat the enemies of Israel. In neither of the first two cases did God use anything other than their own "supernatural fear" as weapons against them; therefore, since the incident is used with like cases in a paragraph illustrating God's use of "a supernatural fear," we must conclude He (or His angel) used the same weapon in "smiting" 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrian army. No where but in our imagination does evidence exist that God or His agent drew blood.

Question 8: The 144,000

Do we have any evidence of a connection between the 144,000 and the character of God message?

Answer:

In John 17:26, emphasis supplied throughout) Jesus prays, "I have declared unto them *Thy name*." Verse 6 says, "I have manifested *Thy name* unto men." How did He do this? By living the Father's character before their eyes. Revelation 14:1 describes the 144,000 as "having the Father's *name* written in their foreheads." Apparently the 144,000 have a special understanding of the Father's character. Since the 144,000 do not ascend the stage of history until the end, it places the timing in our day. Is it their understanding that God is by nature and behavior a benefactor and not a destroyer? The answer to that question lies in the strength of support in the inspired word for the concept itself. Enough of us think the evidence is overwhelming. At least, it is enough that Christians resolved to follow the light owe it to themselves to study it thoroughly and prayerfully.

Further, evidence exists it is the 144,000 who give the three angels' messages in their primary, antitypical fulfillment. The fullest description of the 144,000 appears in Revelation 14:1-5 as introduction to the three angels' messages. These messages cannot be given without understanding the Biblical definition of "the wrath of God" (v. 10), which shows God as "merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth"

and that His “wrath” is simply what happens to humans who remove themselves from the safety of His presence.

Otherwise, the messages show God saying, Obey Me or I’ll burn you—a position that contradicts everything God is about, including His commitment to human free will, and throws the whole statement into confusion.

The Knowledge of God

"There is nothing that more decidedly distinguishes the Christian from the worldly man than the estimate he has of God" (Letter 15-1).

1. Question: Where do we begin our search for truth?

Answer:

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32).

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

"Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world. The proclamation of the third angel's message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath truth. This truth, with others included in the message, is to be proclaimed; but the great center of attraction, Christ Jesus, must not be left out" (GW 156).

"In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary" (GW 315).

"The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God.... The burden of every book and every passage of the Bible is the unfolding of this wondrous theme.... He who grasps this thought has before him an infinite field for study. He has the key that will unlock to him the whole treasure house of God's word" (Ed. 125-26).

"Jesus placed the cross in line with the light coming from heaven, for it is there that it shall catch the eye of man. The cross is in direct line with the shining of the divine countenances, so that by beholding the cross men may see and know God and Jesus Christ,

whom He hath sent. In beholding God we behold the One who poured out His soul unto death. In beholding the cross the view is extended to God, and His hatred of sin is discerned. But while we behold in the cross God's hatred of sin, we also behold His love for sinners, which is stronger than death. To the world the cross is the incontrovertible argument that God is truth and light and love" (ST 3/7/1895; 5BC 1133).

"The mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries. In the light that streams from Calvary the attributes of God which had filled us with fear and awe appear beautiful and attractive. Mercy, tenderness and parental love are seen to blend with holiness, justice and power. While we behold the majesty of His throne, high and lifted up, we see His character in its gracious manifestations and comprehend, as never before, the significance of that endearing title, 'Our Father'" (GC 652).

"We have not held up before the people the righteousness of Christ and the full significance of His great plan of redemption. We have left out Christ and His matchless love, brought in theories and reasonings and preached argumentative discourses....

"How, then, can [we] preach the love, the sympathy, the forgiveness of God for all sins? ... Looking at the cross of Calvary, you will have a desire to bear the cross. A world's Redeemer hung upon the cross of Calvary. Behold the Saviour of the world, in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (FW 16).

2. Question: Christ came to this world to save sinners and for what other reason?

Answer:

"Christ came to reveal to the world the knowledge of the character of God, of which the world was destitute. This knowledge was the chief treasure which He committed to the disciples to be communicated to men.... Christ came to change the order of things that then existed and to reveal to them the character of the Father. He drew aside the veil which concealed His glory from the eyes of mortals, and made manifest to the world the only true and living God, whom to know aright is life eternal" (RH 11/1/1892).

"God saw that the world was destitute of true knowledge, and He sent Christ into the world to live the law and represent him.

This was the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The knowledge of God was the chief treasure Christ brought to man. It was His prerogative to impart this knowledge, and He gave it to His disciples to be given to the world" (GCB 10/01/1899)

"The knowledge of God, as revealed in Christ, is the knowledge that all who are saved must have" (8T 289).

"All man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son" (8T 286).

3. Question: What is the most essential thing to know?

Answer:

"The essential knowledge is a knowledge of God and of Him whom He has sent" (MH 401).

"In order to be co-workers with God, in order to become like Him and to reveal His character, we must know Him aright. We must know Him as He reveals Himself" (MH 40).

"The knowledge of God as revealed in His word is the knowledge to be given to our children" (MH 460).

"The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have.... This is the knowledge that God invites His children to receive, beside which all else is vanity and nothingness" (AA 475).

"If Christ had thought it necessary, he could have opened to his disciples mysteries which would have eclipsed and put far out of sight all the discoveries of the human mind. He could have presented facts concerning every subject that would have gone beyond human reasonings, and yet not misrepresented the truth in any particular. He could have revealed that which was unknown, that which would have put imagination to the stretch, and attracted the thoughts of successive generations to the close of earth's history. He could have opened doors into mysteries that the human mind had sought in vain to open. He could have presented to men a tree of knowledge from which they might have plucked from age to age; but this work was not essential to their soul's salvation,

but this work was not essential to their soul's salvation, but this work was not essential to their soul's salvation, but this work was not essential to their soul's salvation, and the knowledge of the character of God was necessary to their eternal interests" (ST 5/1/1893).

4. Question: Why is a knowledge of God important?

Answer:

"A knowledge of God is the foundation of all true education and of all true service. It is the only real safeguard against temptation. It is this alone that can make us like God in character.

"This is the knowledge needed by all who are working for the uplifting of their fellow men. Transformation of character, purity of life, efficiency in service, adherence to correct principles, all depend upon a right knowledge of God. This knowledge is the essential preparation both for this life and for the life to come" (MH 409).

"The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have. It is the knowledge that works transformation of character. This knowledge received, will recreate the soul in the image of God. It will impart to the whole being a spiritual power that is divine" (MH 425).

"The knowledge of God that works transformation of character is our great need. If we fulfill His purpose, there must be in our lives a revelation of God that shall correspond to the teaching of His word" (8T 329).

"The knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ expressed in character is an exaltation above everything else that is esteemed on earth or in heaven. It is the very highest education. It is the key that opens the portals of the heavenly city. This knowledge it is God's purpose that all who put on Christ shall possess" (MH 457).

"The heavenly intelligences are waiting with almost impatient earnestness to make Him known to the human agents, that they may be laborers together with these heavenly angels in presenting Jesus — the world's Redeemer, full of grace and truth" (OFC 59).

"Walk continually in the light of God. Meditate day and night

upon His character. Then you will see His beauty and rejoice in His goodness. Your heart will glow with a sense of His love. You will be uplifted as if borne by everlasting arms. With the power and light that God imparts, you can comprehend more and accomplish more than you ever before deemed possible" (MH 514).

"Holiness is agreement with God. By sin the image of God in man has been marred and well-nigh obliterated; it is the work of the gospel to restore that which has been lost, and we are to cooperate with the divine agency in this work. And how can we come into harmony with God, how shall we receive His likeness, unless we obtain a knowledge of Him? It is this knowledge that Christ came into the world to reveal unto us.

"The meager views which so many have had of the exalted character and office of Christ have narrowed their religious experience and have greatly hindered their progress in the divine life" (5T 743).

"Just before us is the closing struggle of the great controversy when, with 'all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness,' Satan is to work to misrepresent the character of God, that he may 'seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.' If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world. Those to whom has been committed a trust so sacred must be spiritualized, elevated, vitalized, by the truths they profess to believe. Never did the church more sorely need, and never was God more solicitous that she should enjoy, the experience described in Paul's letter to the Colossians when he wrote: We 'do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God' (5T 746).

5. Question: What is Satan's most steadfast intent?

Answer:

"(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds); Casting down

imaginings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:4).

"It is Satan's constant effort to misrepresent the character of God, the nature of sin, and the real issues at stake in the great controversy" (GC 569).

"It is Satan's constant study to keep the minds of men occupied with those things which will prevent them from obtaining the knowledge of God" (ST 740).

"To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan" (DA 22).

6. Question: What is the last message of mercy to go to the world?

Answer:

"The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:23, 24).

"In each generation there is a new development of truth" (COL 127).

"The heavenly intelligences are waiting with almost impatient earnestness to make Him known to the human agents, that they may be laborers together with these heavenly angels in presenting Jesus—the world's Redeemer, full of grace and truth" (OFC 58).

"In the parable the wise virgins had oil in their vessels with their lamps. Their light burned with undimmed flame through the night of watching. It helped to swell the illumination for the bridegroom's honor. Shining out in the darkness, it helped to illuminate the way to the home of the bridegroom, to the marriage feast.

"So the followers of Christ are to shed light into the darkness of the world. Through the Holy Spirit, God's word is a light as it

becomes a transforming power in the life of the receiver. By implanting in their hearts the principles of His word, the Holy Spirit develops in men the attributes of God. The light of His glory—His character—is to shine forth in His followers. Thus they are to glorify God, to lighten the path to the Bridegroom's home to the city of God, to the marriage supper of the Lamb....

"It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence; saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth."

"This is the work outlined by the prophet Isaiah in the words 'O Jerusalem that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.' Isa. 40:9, 10.

"Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people 'Behold your God.' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory; their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them..." (COL 414-416, emphasis supplied).

7. Question: What is the wrath of God?

Answer:

Four examples will be given: a) the example of Jesus; b) the example of the destruction of Jerusalem; c) the example of Noah's flood and Sodom; and d) the testimony of Scripture.

a) The Example of Jesus

"In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary" (GW 315).

"Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, eli, lama sabachthani? [My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?] The wrath of God fell upon Christ. This was the hiding of the Father's

countenance upon Christ." (ST 4/14/1898). [See also Psalm 88:16; 38:1; 1T 482, 2T 214, RH 2/24/1874, RH 9/11/1888, RH 10/9/1888, RH 6/17/1890, etc., etc.²]

"He had walked in the light of God's presence.... but now He seemed to be shut out from the light of God's sustaining presence. Now He was numbered with the transgressors. The guilt of fallen humanity He must bear.... Feeling how terrible is the wrath of God against transgression, He exclaims, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.' ...

"He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it.... As man He must endure the *wrath of God* against transgression....

"Christ was suffering under divine justice. *He saw what justice meant.... The sins of men weighed heavily upon Christ, and the sense of God's wrath against sin was crushing out His life*" (DA 685-7, emphasis supplied).

"The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they sow. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life" (DA 764).

"The *wrath of God* against sin ... filled the soul of His Son with consternation.... *Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race.* It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter and broke the heart of the Son of God (DA 753, emphasis supplied).

"God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression, but He leaves the rejecters of His

² Note in connection with references from the Psalms: "It is impossible to touch the whole 50 Psalms in detail in one lesson or in a dozen lessons; yet in a sense we can touch the whole 50 by so touching a few as to show the one great secret of the whole number and that secret is Christ. We shall take some of the Psalms of which God Himself has made the application to Christ so that there can be no possible doubt that that Psalm refers to Christ. Then when we read these Psalms, we know that we are reading of Jesus Christ and of God's dealings with Him—He too being ourselves all the time, weak as we are, sinful as we are in the flesh, made to be sinners just as we are, all our guilt and our sins being laid upon Him and He feeling the guilt and the condemnation of it in all things as ourselves" [A. T. Jones, 1895 *General Conference Bulletin*. NOTE: Ellen White says his message was direct from God (documentation available)].

mercy to themselves to reap that which they have sown" (GC 36; DA 865-67; Psalm 78:48; 5:10; 81:11-14).

"God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself" (COL 84).

b) The Example of the Destruction of Jerusalem

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:37, 38).

"The Saviour's prophecy concerning the visitation of judgments upon Jerusalem is to have another fulfillment, of which that terrible desolation was but a faint shadow. In the fate of the chosen city we may behold the doom of a world that has rejected God's mercy and trampled upon His law" (GC 36).

Said John the Baptist, "Who hath warned you to flee from the *wrath to come?*" (Matt. 3:7).

"The hour of hope and pardon was fast passing; the cup of God's long deferred *wrath* was almost full.... [Christ] saw but the first draft from that cup of *wrath* which at the final judgment she must drain to its dregs....

"Christ saw in Jerusalem a symbol of the world hardened in unbelief and rebellion, and hastening on to meet the retributive judgments of God. Jesus declared to the listening disciples the judgments that were to fall upon apostate Israel, and especially the retributive vengeance that would come upon them for their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah,... Because of her sins, *wrath* had been denounced against Jerusalem.... For nearly forty years ...the Lord delayed His judgments upon the city and the nation" (GC 20-27, emphasis supplied). [Note: How many synonyms can you find in this section of *Great Controversy* for "God's wrath"? When that wrath finally came, HOW did it come? See below.]

"God *withdrew* His protection from them and *removed* His restraining power from Satan and his angels, and the nation was *left* to the control of the leader she had chosen. . . . Satan was at the head of the nation...

“Israel had spurned the *divine protection*, and now she had no defense.... A multitude of voices were heard crying: ‘Let us *depart hence*.’ ... Above the sound of battle, voices were heard shouting: ‘Ichabod!—*the glory is departed*’” (GC 28-33, emphasis supplied).

“Their sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work. By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, *the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will*.... It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan.... But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed” [(GC 35, emphasis supplied.) **Note:** Read chapter 1 of *Great Controversy* in entirety.]

Thought Question: Was the wrath of God against Jesus the same as or different from the wrath of God against Jerusalem? Consider this question in connection with the following points, as well:

c) **The Example of Noah’s Flood and Sodom**

“Men cannot with impunity reject the warning which God in mercy sends them. A message was sent from heaven to the world in Noah’s day, and their salvation depended upon the manner in which they treated that message. Because they rejected the warning, *the Spirit of God was withdrawn from the sinful race, and they perished in the waters of the Flood*. In the time of Abraham, *mercy ceased to plead* with the guilty inhabitants of Sodom, and all but Lot with his wife and two daughters were *consumed by the fire* sent down from heaven. So in the days of Christ. The Son of God declared to the unbelieving Jews of that generation: ‘Your house is left unto you desolate.’ Matthew 23:38. Looking down to the last days, the same Infinite Power declares, concerning those who ‘received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved’: ‘For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. As they *reject the teachings of His word, God withdraws His Spirit and leaves them to the deceptions which they love*” (GC 431, emphasis supplied).

NOTE: The above paragraph compares four events: the flood of Noah, the destruction of Sodom, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the world at the end. All met (or will meet) the same fate for the same reason. What was the fate? What was the reason?

"In his hatred of God, in falsifying His character, in manifesting irreverence, contempt and hatred toward the laws of His government, Satan had made iniquity reach unto the heavens.... The sword of justice was unsheathed, and the wrath of God against iniquity rested upon man's substitute, Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father.

"In the Garden of Gethsemane Christ suffered in man's stead.... Human nature would then and there have died under the horror of the sense of sin, had not an angel from heaven strengthened Him to bear the agony.

"The power that inflicted retributive justice upon man's substitute and surety, was the power that sustained and upheld the suffering One under the tremendous weight of wrath that would have fallen upon a sinful world. Christ was suffering the death that was pronounced upon the transgressors of God's law.

"It is a fearful thing for the unrepenting sinner to fall into the hands of the living God. This is proved by the history of the destruction of the old world by a flood, by the record of the fire which fell from heaven and destroyed the inhabitants of Sodom. But never was this proved to so great an extent as in the agony of Christ, the Son of the infinite God, when He bore the wrath of God for a sinful world....

"No sorrow can bear any comparison with the sorrow of Him upon whom the wrath of God fell with overwhelming force.... The agony which Christ endured broadens, deepens, and gives a more extended conception of the character of sin, and the character of the retribution which God will bring upon those who continue in sin" (5 BC 1102-3).

NOTE: According to the above, "the wrath of God," "retribution," "retributive justice" came to Jesus, to the antediluvians, to the residents of Sodom. All received a like punishment. One must look to the cross and to the dynamics by which Christ, man's Substitute and Surety, died to understand the dynamics by which the others died (or will die). The principles by which each experienced the "retributive justice" of God were the same, though expressed through differing circumstances.

d) The Testimony of Scripture

“He that spared not his own Son, but *delivered him up* for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32, emphasis supplied).

“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded.... Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.... Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices” (Proverbs 1:24-33).

“Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

DEFINING SCRIPTURES: Note the following four elements of the wrath of God:

- 1) **Because sin is cherished,**
- 2) *God withdraws;*
- 3) This results in trouble, and
- 4) [equals His wrath]

INSTRUCTIONS: Mark the following statements with the four elements described above. Do they agree or disagree with the way in which God struck Jesus, Jerusalem the antediluvian world, Sodom and Gomorrah? (We have inspired statements indicating this was the way in which God struck in virtually all examples of Biblical punishment/consequences. Does the Bible contradict itself? Not at all. We can explain the apparent contradictions convincingly from the inspired word.)

“My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods” (Deut. 31:17, 18).

“I will slay in My anger and My fury all for whose wickedness I have hidden My face from this city” (Jer. 33:5).

“For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God.... Therefore the wrath of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble” (2 Chron. 29:6-8).

“For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry” (Isaiah 57:17).

“They caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore, the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight.... The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight” (2 Kings 17:17-20).

“For the Lord will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River, because they have made their wooden images provoking the Lord to anger. And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 14:15, 16).

